

Finding Value in Human Relations

Neil A. Hauenstein



DEFENSE EQUAL OPPORTUNITY MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE

DIRECTORATE OF RESEARCH

Directed by Dr. Daniel P. McDonald, Director of Research
Spring 2011

Technical Report [Executive Summary] # 97-11

Executive Summary

Issue

Equal opportunity and diversity are often treated as two sides of a single coin. That is, if an organization complies with equal opportunity regulations/statutes and meaningfully embraces affirmative action, then the result is a fair and diverse organization. The reality is that this single-coin viewpoint is a gross oversimplification. We propose a value framework that addresses the complexities of equal opportunity and diversity, and discuss the implications of this value framework in relation to the important issues faced by DEOMI.

Value Framework

Value is determined by three factors, the first being *outcome value* as the primary source. At the individual level, outcome value is reflected in increasing pleasure and decreasing pain. At the organizational level, outcome value is reflected in increasing efficiencies and profits and decreasing inefficiencies and costs.

The second is *value created through belief systems* as the secondary source. Shared beliefs specify ideal objectives to be achieved and the allowable activities to pursue ideal objectives. The driving complexity for leading equal opportunity and diversity efforts is that there are two competing belief systems in play, and each belief system is represented by ideal objectives that are complimentary opposites. Meritocracy belief system: Within the meritocracy belief system, the ideal objective of equity is complimented by the ideal objective of nondiscrimination. Equity cannot be achieved without nondiscrimination and nondiscrimination cannot be achieved without equity, but equity is pursued differently than nondiscrimination. Egalitarianism belief system: Within the egalitarian belief system the ideal objective of equality is complimented by the ideal objective of social justice. Equality cannot be achieved without

social justice and social justice cannot be achieved without equality, but equality is pursued differently than social justice.

The third value is *regulatory fit* as the tertiary source. The ideal objectives of belief systems can be represented as shared aspirations (e.g., diversity as a hope) or shared obligations (e.g., diversity as a social responsibility). Value is created when shared aspirations are eagerly pursued (i.e., goal pursuits that increase the likelihood of achieving a shared aspiration) and when shared obligations are vigilantly pursued (i.e., goal pursuits that decrease the probability of failing to achieve a shared obligation).

Examples of Implications for DEOMI

The above value framework had many implications for the work done at DEOMI. We provide three examples of important implications.

The Outcome Value Question

Questions often arise regarding empirical evidence that the efforts and activities provided by DEOMI provide discernable benefits for military effectiveness. This question directs attention toward not only outcome value, but understanding the importance of value created through shared beliefs and regulatory fit; this provides a better framework from which to understand the outcome value issues. Shared belief systems, such as meritocracy and egalitarianism, specify what is morally correct. When something is morally correct, outcome value questions should be framed in terms of losses, for example, how does the failure to comply with equal opportunity regulations or the failure to pursue a positive diversity climate reduce military readiness? How does discriminatory behaviors and negative diversity climate reduce military readiness?

The outcome value question is typically phased incorrectly in terms of gains, for example, how does the compliance with equal opportunity regulations or the pursuing a positive diversity climate increase military readiness? How does preventing discriminatory behaviors and preventing a negative diversity climate increase military readiness? When external stakeholders ask outcome value questions framed as gains, the DEOMI response should be to reframe the question in terms of losses.

More importantly, data does not currently exist to answer outcome value questions. Beyond reframing outcome value questions in terms of losses, the DEOMI response to external stakeholders asking any outcome value question should be, what are you prepared to do to empower the Research Directorate to answer outcome value questions? A few examples are collecting individual EOA on-the-job performance measures that can be linked to individual EOA training outcomes and collecting unit-level performance data that can be linked to unit-level diversity climate data from the DEOCS.

Resistance to collecting such data is related to regulatory fit. The military culture is to vigilantly pursue avoidance of mistakes. Unit commanders that allow such data to be collected, especially unit level performance data, risk being held accountable as a poor leader.

EOA “Suitability”

The meritocracy belief system is more strongly embedded in military culture than the egalitarian belief system, especially the equity ideal objective of the meritocracy belief system. The equity ideal is based on beliefs that individuals earn assignments and responsibilities based on meaningful individual differences, such as aptitude, personality, physical capabilities, work ethic, etc. Strong believers in the equity ideal objective are the least well-suited individuals to be EOAs because acceptable goal pursuits of the equity ideal objective by definition minimize

diversity. The stronger the belief in the trainee's belief in the equity ideal objective, the greater the resistance to EOA training, and the greater the need for powerful experiential learning experiences to foster the acceptance of alternative ideal objectives, such as the nondiscrimination ideal objective.

EOA and Diversity as Shared Obligations

The military culture also tends to frame ideal objectives as shared obligations, as opposed to shared aspirations. Given this preference for viewing ideal objectives as shared obligations, value is more likely to be created by framing EOA training goals as vigilant goal pursuits. That is, EOA training is more likely to “feel right” to the trainees if equal opportunity training frames activities as the vigilant pursuit of the ideal objectives of nondiscrimination, equality, and social justice. For example, diversity information is more likely to “feel right” to EOA trainees when framed as a responsibility intended to prevent a negative diversity climate, instead of framing it as an activity intended to promote a positive diversity climate.

Future Plans

The immediate goal is to include versions of our value system arguments as part of a symposium submitted to the annual conference for the Society of Industrial-Organizational Psychology, and for submission to the upcoming DEOMI Diversity Worldwide conference. We are also working on a manuscript for publication, although this manuscript is not specifically focused on DEOMI implications. Rather, the manuscript targets a broad audience of equal opportunity/diversity researchers and practitioners.